

## United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510-4802

April 2, 2012

The Honorable Barack H. Obama  
President of the United States  
The White House  
1600 Pennsylvania Avenue, N.W.  
Washington, D.C. 20500

Dear President Obama,

I am encouraged by your recent comments regarding the transition of U.S. forces to a support role by the end of 2013. I understand that this represents a further acceleration of the drawdown that you announced last June, but I request that you continue to look at every possible avenue for safely and responsibly bringing our troops home even more expeditiously. I believe strongly that it is time for the bulk of our forces in Afghanistan to come home.

I have long had, and continue to have, grave concerns about our military commitment to Afghanistan. Over the past weeks, the spate of tragic killings of American soldiers by their Afghan partners, combined with the widespread anti-American protests that followed the accidental burning of Korans at Bagram Airfield, and the alleged murder of a number of Afghan civilians by a U.S. service member, underscore the daunting complexities of our forces' efforts in Afghanistan.

These recent incidents highlight a harsh reality that persists in Afghanistan – despite our military's many successes, and incredible sacrifices, there is no amount of funding, time, or heroism that can fundamentally address many of the deep-seated challenges that face Afghanistan. Those challenges belong to a nation whose complex histories and cultures we will never fully understand, and it is time to let the Afghan people take ownership of their own future.

Local Afghan populations and their regional neighbors - some cooperative and others adversarial - will long outlast our presence in the region, and will ultimately determine the fate of the country. We should certainly engage these stakeholders where we can, as your administration has worked hard to do, but our mission in Afghanistan is focused first and foremost on the protection of U.S. national security interests – namely defeating Al Qa'ida and ensuring that they can never use safe havens in the region as a platform from which to attack us. This goal can be pursued and achieved with a much smaller military footprint.

I applaud the amazing gains that our military and intelligence professionals have made, under your leadership, in disrupting and depleting Al Qa'ida and its associates in the Taliban. We should continue to pursue a focused and hard-hitting counterterrorism strategy in Afghanistan so that the progress we have made is not undone. But the full transition of this war effort to a new phase of Special Operations Forces and technological superiority is overdue.

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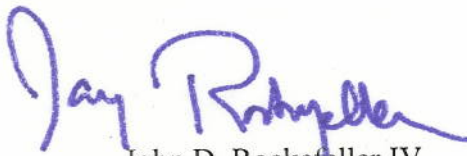
At a time when budgets for critical programs in the United States are being cut to address the deficit, the staggering expense of our efforts in Afghanistan - now nearly \$2.5 billion per week - is neither sustainable, nor advisable.

We first entered Afghanistan with a mandate to find those who were responsible for the attacks of September 11<sup>th</sup>, 2001, and to eliminate the threat that they posed to the U.S. and her allies. Though the global effort to eradicate Al Qa'ida continues, Osama bin Laden has been killed and the organization that he once led is nearing strategic defeat. In Afghanistan we have largely achieved our original goals. It is now time for our troops to come home.

The tragic events over the past weeks are emblematic of vast and unchanging challenges that will always face us in Afghanistan, and these events reinforce my longstanding concerns about the viability of our conventional military efforts there. It is time to narrow our mission, bring home as many of our soldiers as we can, and focus even more precisely on the targeted counterterrorism objectives that are necessary to protect the country.

Mr. President, as you and your administration consider the options for withdrawing U.S. forces from Afghanistan, know that you have my full fledged support in bringing our troops back to their families and loved ones as quickly as possible.

Sincerely,



John D. Rockefeller IV